A DAY WITH THE UP-STATE PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

Their Problems Range From New York Central's Refinancing Scheme to Complaint of Flat Wheel That Keeps Mr. Jones Awake Nights

"The time has come," the chairman says,
"To talk of many things—
Of flat wheels, bonds and mortgages
And cabbages and kings—
Of meters, rates and kilowatts
And Suffragettes with wings."

THE crier who used this perversion of a famous poem to convene the Public Service Commission of the Second District might be declared in contempt. But he would not be overstating the range of the commission's duties.

Indeed, one can imagine Chairman Decker of the commission condoning the crier's contempt by explaining that the range from flat wheels to winged suffragists "really covers only a small part of the commission's work" Then, doubtless, Mr. Decker would voice his favorite sentiment, "If the people of New York State only understood us and our work as they ought this range of activity wouldn't be so astonishing."

To men who do understand the scope of its work the great State House on Capitol Hill at Albany and the modest little home of the commission across the street at 19 Washington avenue form one of the strangest contrasts imaginable. Out of the great gray stone pile on the hilltop comes a mass of legislation, sometimes confusing, almost always difficult to follow in all its ramifications.

Out of the unpretentious little building across the way, where the commission holds most of its hearings, there come the promptness of action and clearness of purpose that the modern American business man likes—quick, clean cut decisions on matters of public welfare, a prompt summary of right or wrong, a "yes" or "no" based on a careful and intelligent consideration of evidence. A lawyer from a little up-State town put it rather well one day last summer. His particular grievance being adjusted quickly he sat down on the steps of the commission office, mopped his brow, jerked his thumb toward the Capitol across the street and said:

"By George, I've wasted a lot of time over there!"

And it should be added that this obscure up-State lawyer had equal chance before the commission with the famous corporation counsellor who followed him with a plan to refinance a great railroad system.

The commission is, first of all, a court for the people. It is at once the protector of the public, the guide for service corporations, an arbiter of differences between the two and the promulgator of a constructive policy that has the health of both the public and the corporations constantly in view.

Its attentions are chiefly centred on matters that touch the every day life of every day people. The range of business includes the regulation, restrictions and privileges and reasonable usage of the telegraph, telephone, steam heating companies, auto buses, gas and electric companies, street and interurban railroads, steam railroads; regulation of stock and bond issues, notes over one year, the right to engage in business, including the approval of franchises for local public utilities, leases, the right of one company to hold stock in another company, consolidations and mergers, rates, change in equipment, public safety, inspection of railroads, boilers and locomotives.

Rather an imposing array of duties, yet the ramifications, which are practically countless, focus the commission's attention on thousands of matters too uncommon to classify.

If an employee of a public service corporation is injured through faulty machinery or unprotected danger areas it has a duty to perform. To report the injury is compulsory on the part of the corporation. Forthwith the commission despatches its investigators, the findings are carefully weighed and the corporation is ordered what to do in the matter of protecting its employees.

If a railroad endangers the lives of pedestrians, school children especially, the commission receives the complaint and adjusts the matter, to the relief of parents.

If a railroad needs refinancing—the New York Central $100,000,000 refinancing project was recently pending—the commission gives it the same businesslike attention, no more and no less, just a thorough consideration, whether it is a matter of hours or months.

The flat wheel on the line that passes Mr. Jones's house interrupts his slumbers. Mr. Jones takes it straight to the Public Service Commission. Such a thing is a test of patience, but it receives consideration, investigation and final adjustment. Once a street railroad proved that the complainant had chronic insomnia and couldn't sleep anyway.

If it were computable it would doubtless be found that the Public Service Commission's greatest value to the public in dollars and cents is in the matter of regulating issues of stocks and bonds. Time was when such an issue required only the engraver's skill—the skill to print an attractive certificate with an uncommonly imposing seal, the returns from which depended entirely upon glib salesmanship. To-day the man who buys securities that have been authorized by the Public Service Commission may rest assured that the corporation has been investigated far more thoroughly than he could investigate it; that every dollar is offset by existing property or will be offset by projected improvements, and that—barring the dishonesty of officials or the intervention of something beyond human powers to foresee—it will prove to be exactly as represented.

The telephone business may be taken as a concrete example. It is no longer possible for such companies to issue stocks and bonds at will, as their pole lines or other equipment requires extension or rejuvenation.

To-day the procedure is in this fashion: Confronted with the necessity of raising money for improvements the company must make formal application for an issue of stock or bonds in the sum desired. The use to which the money is to be put must be recited in the smallest detail.

Then the commission's work begins. Inspectors are sent to investigate the company's property. Its physical property, its pole lines, cable, underground or overhead lines, switchboard equipment, exchange buildings, the condition of its apparatus—all are carefully noted and recorded.

There follows a thorough inspection of the company's relations with the public. Is its service good? Does it fill a want and meet the needs of the community? Are its employees treated properly? Is it charging enough for its service to be prosperous? Are its rates low enough to be fair to the public? And lastly, are the improvements for which the company asks a new issue of securities necessary to good service?

With these questions answered the commission is ready to proceed. Sometimes the entire issue is refused; again only a portion is allowed; oftentimes the entire issue is found allowable and for the best interests of the public service. There remains but one duty for the commission to perform, that is to determine the figure at which these securities must be sold. And this it does, basing it upon the present service and general prospects of the corporation.

The man whose faith in modern institutions of government is frayed around the edges will find it rehabilitated by attending a meeting of the commission.

A few minutes before 9 o'clock—for the Commissioners agree on a man's workday—a man of medium height and thoroughly businesslike carriage climbs the stone steps briskly, passes through the waiting crowd with a pleasant "Good morning, gentlemen," and enters the inner office. This is Martin S. Decker, chairman of the Public Service Commission of the Second District.

Mr. Decker is a man of middle age and unusual attainments. For twenty years previous to 1907, when he was appointed to the Public Service Commission, he served on the Interstate Commerce Commission. Of him one of his colleagues on that commission once said: "I think Decker was originally designated secretary of the commission, but he served as the whole blamed business." At any rate Mr. Decker brought to the Public Service Commission a great fund of specialized knowledge. Since 1895 he has been recognized as one of the country's foremost experts on transportation, law and practice, a reputation that led to his appointment by Gov. Hughes to the original Public Service Commission.

Closely following Mr. Decker come Commissioner Devoe P. Hodson, who is a lawyer; Commissioner Curtis N. Douglas, who is a business man, and Commissioner James E. Sague, who came to the commission after a lifetime in the service of the great railroads, having served in all capacities from apprentice to the highest executive offices.

Chairman Decker opens the session with as little formality as the average man employs in opening his mail. The Commissioners take their places around the long table, the chairman adjusts his "close range" glasses and says: "Gentlemen, we are ready."

The first happens to be a debonair lawyer. For his clients, a big interurban railroad, he rattles on glibly about "an issue of a million and a half for purposes of refunding, contemplated improvements and improvements already under way."

It is evident that the commission has studied the matter from the written petition that preceded the legal representative. Yet there is very respectful attention to the very last word. Then the chairman replies quietly:

"The commission will be pleased to act upon your matter at the earliest possible moment."

"May it please the commission," says the lawyer, "I should like to urge haste in this matter. A Boston banker has agreed to take the entire issue if the matter can be authorized by you before——"

"Sir, this commission will not be forced by the whim of any banker. The authorization of a million and a half is no passing matter and this commission will not be hurried in its deliberations. Next case!"

A young lawyer, scarcely out of his 20's, takes his place at the chairman's call and pleads for his client, an electric light and power company in a small middle State city, praying for a new issue of stock, also to be used for refunding purposes and to provide working capital. The ease with which the young lawyer tells the story and recites the woes of his client shows too plainly the studied, memorized speech. Yet the commission listens attentively, kindly, and he is well into his last argument before Chairman Decker interrupts him with a query that reveals full knowledge of affairs of the electric light and power company in the middle State town.

"If I am not mistaken, young man, there still remains unsold a considerable block of the last issue authorized by this commission, at 92, I believe is the figure."

"Er-er-er-yes, sir; some $85,000, I believe. We had hoped the commission might authorize this new issue at a more attractive figure from the investors' viewpoint. The others are hard to sell—I may say impossible."

"Well," continued Chairman Decker, "permit this commission to make a suggestion. Go back home, let your home folks know you have $85,000 in stock to sell at 92 for the purpose of bettering and extending public service in their home town. Appeal to their civic pride. I know the people of your town pretty well and unless I am very much mistaken they will take it readily. If they do not, come back here and we'll talk it over again."

This is the "constructive policy" for which the commission is becoming famous. Obviously the suggested plan is a better one than the young lawyer offered and leaves less of a burden for his clients to bear.

Next comes an up-State lawyer with a prayer that his clients, a long established lumber company, be permitted to abandon a railroad or make somebody a present of it! Built in St. Lawrence county in the days when timber was plentiful, it operated between a main line and a town that once boasted a population of 700. But now that the timber is all cut away, the population has shrunk to 50.

"We are operating at a loss of $25 a day," he explains. "The fare is only 30 cents one way and some days we carry only two passengers. We have tried to give it to the New York Central but they won't take it."

It might seem that the spectacle of a man dodging around the dark corners trying to hide a railroad in somebody's pocket would bring a smile to even the sedate commission. But it doesn't. They don't concede the right of a man to abandon or give away a railroad whenever the whim strikes him. They see only the 50 people housed away up in the northern village suddenly deprived of railroad facilities.

"Why don't you provide a gasolene engine, operated like an automobile, so these people can come out when they wish, or that fishermen, resorters and hunters can go in at will?"

"My clients do not wish to do this. Their sole desire is to get rid of the property."

"This commission denies your petition," says the chairman, "for the reason that it is not within the province of this commission to grant it. This clears the way for you to present the matter to the Legislature in the form of an amendment extending our powers in this respect."

So it goes all day—dozens of new cases, few alike and nearly every one with a new angle. In the late afternoon when the last of the disappointed or jubilant lawyers has left, the Commissioners hold a supplementary session in Mr. Decker's office, where they consider the more trivial complaints that come by mail.

So far as is discoverable the Public Service Commission of New York State runs the only correspondence school of trouble extant. But it is not without its humor; the Commissioners find the deluge of mail complaints leavens the other and more serious business of the day.

Somehow one can understand why a woman whose sleep is disturbed by the explosion of her neighbor's canned fruit might make it the subject of a letter to the commission. But why a man should ask the commission to enjoin the only laundry in town from returning his collars with saw edges taxes the average man's faith in his fellows.

Any number of freak complaints come to the commission. Here are enough of them to show their variety and degree of freakishness:

A butcher at Mount Upton refuses to sell Mr. Jones any meat. The complainant wishes to know the method of procedure for compelling him to do so.

Hamilton, N. Y., complainant wants the commission to compel a real estate agent to put fire escapes on Odd Fellows Hall.

Watertown, N. Y., complainant wants his neighbor's dog suppressed. He cannot sleep.

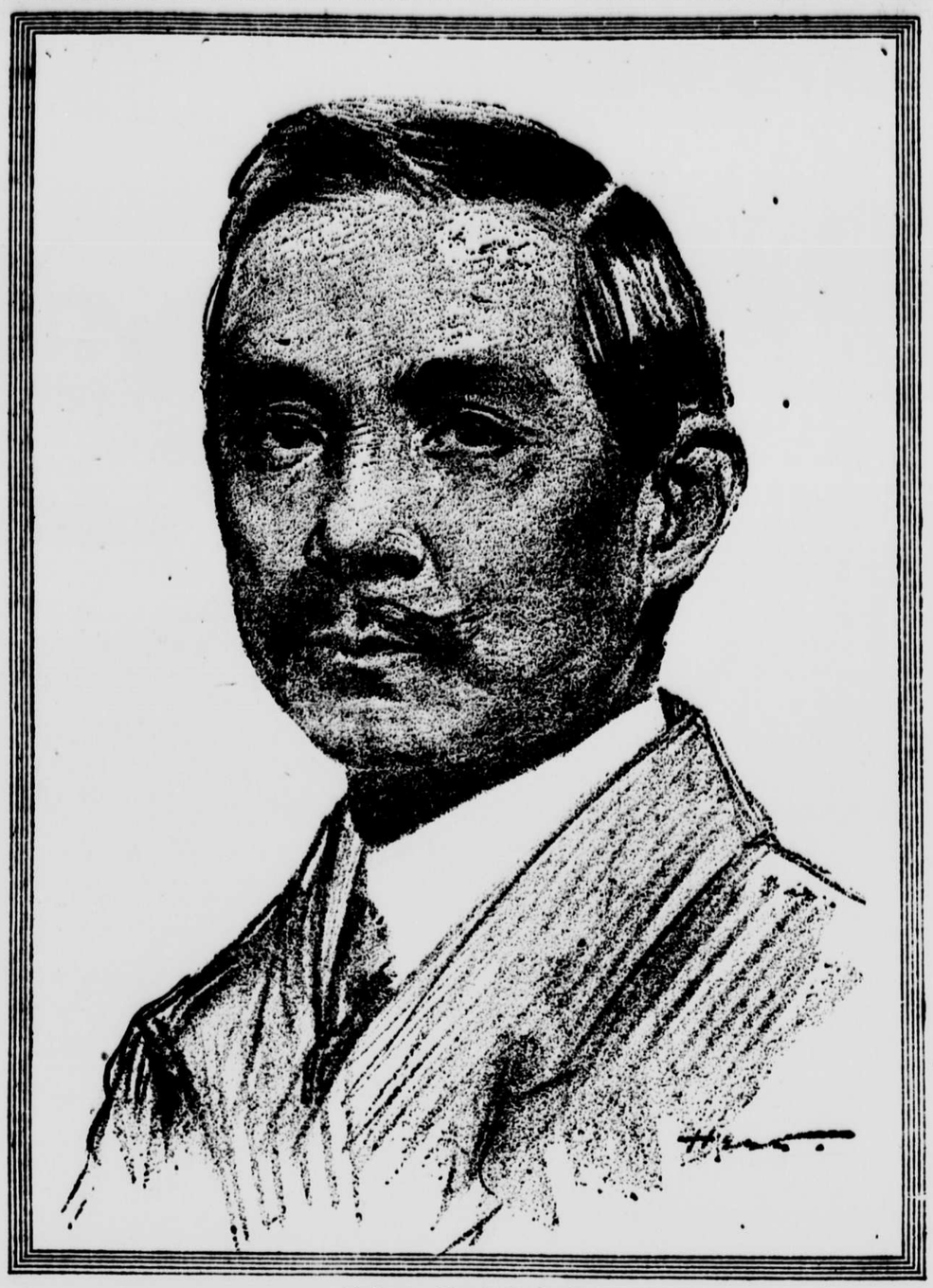
Hamilton complainant wants to know why his neighbor can buy 60 pounds of lard from a jobber and he cannot.

Woman in Waynesburg wants the commission to recommend a good lawyer to handle a matter she has in mind.

Index, N. Y., man wants to know what can be done to a dentist who made a set of teeth that doesn't fit and has been paid for in advance.

Washington complainant says he was charged 10 cents for a Sunday paper just as he was about to board a train for Schenectady.

Far Rockaway woman complains that the maid furnished her by an employment agency remained less than a week.



Chairman Martin S. Decker.

Ballington Booth Resigned From Salvation Army Rather Than Leave America

Meeting of Brothers a Few Days Ago After an Estrangement of Many Years Recalls Controversy of 1896. When It Was Decided Ballington Should Go to England.

Gen. Booth, Then in Command, Insisted on Obedience, and Son Withdrew—Organized Volunteers of America and Received Support From Many Wealthy Persons.

THE meeting of Bramwell and Ballington Booth a few days ago after an estrangement of many years has led to the making public of many versions of the controversy which culminated more than seventeen years ago in the withdrawal of Ballington Booth from the Salvation Army. But the truth appears to be that he resigned rather than leave America. He had contracted an affection for the country which made a permanent residence elsewhere intolerable to him. Mrs. Maud Ballington Booth shared his sentiments and stoutly supported him in his determination to remain in "the land of the free and the home of the brave."

Early in the year of 1896 the authorities at London decided that the two able leaders of the Salvation Army in America could do invaluable service in another country, where, it was said, the cause showed symptoms of waning. They were notified to "farewell." This warning came as a shock to the young Booths and their American friends.

Of course when Ballington Booth was "sworn in" he promised to obey his superior officers, to accept without demur or question of any kind any assignment that might be given him and to completely efface himself if deemed essential to the promotion of the cause. This oath is taken by every man and woman commissioned to serve the organization. The children of the founder were expected to adhere even more tenaciously to the principles inculcated by the Salvation Army than those who were not connected by the ties of blood with the General.

But Ballington Booth thought the exigencies of the American situation would justify a departure from the rule of unquestioning obedience which was established when the Salvation Army was in its swaddling clothes.

A number of his influential friends represented to him that to leave the country at that time would be to invite disaster for the entire movement in America. He appears to have accepted this view of the situation and London was urged to rescind its decision.

In London it was believed that the work was so well established in America as to make it safe to leave it in the hands of a man not quite so prominent in the Salvation Army as Gen. Booth's son.

A committee of citizens and well wishers of the Salvation Army, headed by Chauncey M. Depew, who was then in the heyday of his popularity, petitioned London to permit Ballington Booth to retain his American command. But Gen. Booth, who was supported by his cabinet, was obdurate. He said the decision was not the result of caprice, it was not hastily arrived at and that it was irrevocable.

Bramwell Booth, who was then chief of staff, communicated the decision of his father to Senator Depew. In the letter he assured Mr. Depew of his and his father's appreciation of the sympathy shown by Americans for the cause, but he said no exception to an imperative rule could be made in the case of any member of the Booth family. They occupied the same relation to the organization as the humblest officer in it, Bramwell Booth said.

From past experience Ballington Booth knew to attempt to change a decision of his father's when it was once announced would be as difficult as to obtain the revocation of a Median-Persian decree. The truth is to have done so would have been to create a breach equally as serious as the withdrawal of his son, with his vast influence, from the Salvation Army. The rank and file would look with extreme disfavor on any measure that would make any member of the Booth family the object of "privileged legislation." In other words, worldwide discontent and distrust may have followed a reconsideration of the General's decision.

In the Salvation Army Gen. Booth sustained the relation to Ballington of a superior to a subordinate officer, not that of a father to a son. To have assumed any other position would have been subversive of discipline and probably destructive to the very fabric of the organization itself. It was realized as soon as Ballington issued what might be termed an ultimatum that his loss to the movement would be enormous. But his father was immovable. He said he exacted obedience from the lowly officers and he could not exempt those in exalted commands, even though they be his own sons or daughters.

He was urged to compromise or do something to save Ballington and his brilliant and devoted wife to the movement. He was told that their secession would mean the complete overthrow of the Salvation Army in the United States. But these gloomy predictions failed to move him. He insisted on obedience. He may be wrong, his judgment may be defective, but there was no middle course. Ballington was a soldier and he who would command must be ready and willing to obey.

The friends of the then commander in the United States urged him to resign and organize a new movement which would be democratic in its government. They said it could be utilized as a recruiting station for the churches. They insisted that the United States needed such a movement and he was well qualified to lead it. After much anxious thought he consented and brought into being "The Volunteers of America."

For several weeks he searched for an appropriate name for this organization. One day he shouted "Eureka," and said he would call it "God's American Volunteers." But after some thought he doubted the propriety of appropriating or appearing to appropriate the Diety for a title, and decided to modify it by giving it the title under which it was later incorporated.

It was a gloomy time for the Salvation Army in America. The property of the organization was held in the name of Ballington Booth, and even the *War Cry* bore the legend:

"The *War Cry* and *Official Gazette* of the Salvation Army. Ballington Booth, proprietor." The Salvation Army was not at that time incorporated. After his secession he relinquished his title to the property and did all possible to facilitate the transfer. His successor had the army incorporated and its property so safeguarded that it can never be alienated from the movement or used by some designing person for his own advantage.

But when Ballington retired from the command it was feared by some who did not understand his character or appreciate his innate probity that he would carry the property with him. Not being a corporate body, the Salvation Army's property was subject to spoliation by a possibly unscrupulous leader. Although there have been several splits in the United States, and these splits occurred before it obtained articles of incorporation, no attempt has ever been made by those responsible for the schism to alienate property.

In those days Mrs. Maud Ballington Booth by her gracious manners, her engaging disposition and her genuine sympathy for the homeless and lost won a place in the hearts of many cultured and wealthy citizens of New York. She and her talented husband were made welcome in many drawing rooms. They succeeded in reaching and influencing a class that none of their predecessors in America could get within hailing distance of. These people helped to finance the Salvation Army, and by setting the seal of their approval on its work widened its sphere and broadened its influence.

Some persons have said London did not approve of the social "triumphs" achieved by the son and daughter-in-law of the General. It was thought that Mrs. Maud Ballington Booth had been made a sort of social fad and that when the persons who smiled on her got tired of the diversion they would simply drop her. It is only fair to say that the position she secured for herself eighteen years ago has been strengthened by the lapse of time rather than weakened.

Ballington Booth, after a brief residence in the country, decided to become an American citizen. He told a vast audience in the Legislative Assembly Hall at Topeka, Kan., in February of 1893 that he regarded the Constitution of the United States as the "supreme expression of a free people." He said he gloried in the fact that he was the father of "a Yankee son." The vast audience cheered lustily and he appeared to exult over the fact that he was about to become a naturalized American citizen.

Those who knew him intimately even in those days were aware of the fact that he chafed under the exacting discipline of the Salvation Army, and it is well known that as far as he could he modified it in his field. He believed the American system of government was ideal and a religious movement could find a splendid model in it.

But a curious fact, supported by history, is that the men he took with him when he abandoned his command of the Salvation Army were nearly all Englishmen. The Americans, Germans, Scandinavians and others stood loyally by the parent institution. Gen. Bramwell Booth remarked a short time ago that the American officer was the "most loyal and efficient worker in the Salvation Army."

Brig.-Gen. Fielding of Chicago is Gen. Ballington Booth's chief aid. He was in command of the Western territory for the Salvation Army when Ballington seceded. He was born in England and received his Salvation Army education at the training college in London. Nearly all the officers at the Western headquarters at that time were English and most of them went over to the Volunteers of America, while the few Americans decided to stay with the father of the movement.

The Americans insisted that there was no question of nationality involved and that it would be a mistake to appeal to their own countrymen for support, holding out to them the inducement of a recognition of the superiority of the American over the English system of government. With them it was a question of using the best equipment for the reclamation of their fellow men and they believed the Salvation Army possessed the best equipment.

Ballington, because of his agreeable manners and loving disposition, had won the hearts of all his coworkers. But when he invited them to join him in the new movement they found themselves confronted by a larger question than the obligations which personal association and affection impose. They were obliged to sorrowfully part from him.

Of course it was a backward movement for the Salvation Army for the time. But in a little while it recovered and to-day it has thrice the equipment and five times the number of adherents that it had in America eighteen years ago.

Ballington Booth. W. Bromwell Booth.

These Eggs Beat the Market Variety in Value.

IN A dingy attic at Nazareth, Pa., in glass covered cases coated with dust and fallen mortar and in old boxes packed away in every available nook and cranny was uncovered recently by relic hunters one of the largest collections of bird eggs in the world. It is reputed to be the second largest in the United States.

The collection, owned by Frank Christ of Nazareth, has lain almost forgotten for years, yet its owner will not take $10,000 for it. He was offered $8,000 for it several years ago. The majority of the specimens were inherited by Mr. Christ from his father, the late Richard Christ, who died fourteen years ago at the age of 88 and who gathered most of them himself. The son has taken up the work where the father left off.

The securing of various kinds of hawks' eggs involved thrilling experiences. As hawks make their nest in the highest trees it takes a man of unusual skill and daring to obtain them. After the eggs are taken out of the nest they are placed in a bag packed with straw or grass and the bag is carefully lowered to the ground by means of a rope in order to avoid any possibility of the eggs breaking.

Securing eagles' eggs, too, meant work and danger. In some cases nests built on ledges on the mountains were accessible only from above, and to secure the eggs Mr. Christ lowered a younger and lighter man, by ropes from above. At one time while securing eggs in this way the mother eagle returned to the nest and flying at the intruder, tried to peck out his eyes. She did manage to tear a piece of flesh from his face.

The collection as it stands to-day includes between 400 and 500 different varieties of eggs, but there are thousands of duplicates. They range from the tiny eggs of humming birds to the monster African ostrich eggs. There are eggs from every continent, large and small of all hues and colors and many of them of species now extinct. Some of the eggs are said to be the only specimens of their kind in existence.